

# The Christian News-Letter

No. 249

Edited by  
KATHLEEN BLISS

12th December, 1945

DEAR MEMBER,

We have had over sixty letters in response to a request in News-Letter No. 244 that News-Letter readers would give us their views on a letter from a young mother who asked how it is possible under modern conditions to find time for uninterrupted prayer, and energy, at the end of a long day, for religious reading.

## THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE IN THE MODERN WORLD

Letters have come not only from busy mothers, but from business men, doctors, clergy and men in the forces.

All of them admit that the pressure of the war has made the devotional life exceedingly difficult, though some have found that the war did little more than intensify the struggle to gain time for peace and quiet in a life of unceasing pressure. The matron of a hospital, for instance, writes: "I have lived in hospital for thirty years, working against time mostly—at times quite madly. At the same time a spiritual pilgrimage has been going on."

Yet, without exception, those who write have managed to turn the discipline to good use. "It is a very good thing," says one of them, "when we are prevented from religious reading and regular prayer. It is more than easy for both to become very stale from over-indulgence." Another, who during the war edited a paper and ran a home, says: "I slowly trained myself to rivet my attention far more rapidly than formerly. This took a long time, but proved possible finally by using time in queues and buses to cultivate the art. Then I shortened my prayers and discovered that a good deal of time had been given over to day-dreaming. The sincerity and depth of feeling was what counted." Yet another News-Letter reader who leads an active life in local government, says, "I have come to realize that the religious exercises I used to practise are not really much good, that one needs to work more at one's life and to make that a worthy offering to God."

The conclusion which our members have reached is that the discipline of present conditions must be both accepted and broken. The acceptance becomes possible when one tries to see one's life as a whole, and the pressure of the present time as a given but passing phase in it. "Life seldom remains at a dead level for long," writes an older woman, looking back on a busy life. "There are periods

when things are easier, and one must be on the look-out to seize these joyfully and make the most of them." And another, looking forward, takes the same long view, "After all, children do grow up and I shall not be washing nappies for ever."

Once the discipline of lack of time has been accepted, certain simple priorities in the devotional life stand out.

First, the resolute retention of a period of quiet, however brief, for prayer and reading the Bible morning and evening. Very few of our correspondents find that they can regularly set aside more than a quarter of an hour : some have learned to make fruitful use of five minutes. The hospital matron, quoted in the first paragraph, says, "Praying turned from force of circumstance into keeping quiet. Often at night all one could do was to 'drop' a few bits and pieces of various worries and distractions. This went on for years. One did nothing in the end but offer up one's efforts, failures, hopes and fears—in fact everything until almost all prayer life was in the 'sacrament of the moment.' Such prayer is not quietistic, but vitalizing."

Secondly, even the busiest day offers brief periods when the mind is free, and readers have discovered for themselves a variety of means of using these scraps of time. The Eastern Orthodox "Jesus Prayer," described in *The Way of a Pilgrim*,<sup>1</sup> which is the repetition of a single sentence, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," is known to many. Others repeat a verse or phrase from the Psalms at intervals during the day, using the same phrase for several days and digging deeply into its meaning before passing to another. Others make a habit of lifting up to God at odd moments, not only their own duties and decisions, friends and loved ones, but the things heard on the wireless and read in the newspapers. Our readers do not suggest that such acts of recollection can take the place of set times of prayer : some, indeed, remark that these acts tend to become vague if the regular discipline of prayer is not maintained.

Thirdly, many of our correspondents are somewhat acid in their comments on modern theological and religious books. They take a long time to read. Theological works, in particular, are written in language which demands a high degree of concentration, and to the intelligent reader who is not a professional theologian they do not yield a reward commensurate with the effort. Many modern books on religion, they say, fail to reach sufficient depth to be satisfying. There is strong agreement that it is by reading and re-reading a few books of devotion that the spiritual life is enriched. "Often a scrap of a sentence lasted for days." The books most frequently mentioned are the Letters of Brother Lawrence, of Don John Chapman and of De Caussade, one or two of the works

<sup>1</sup> Translated by R. M. French. S.P.C.K. 3s. 6d.



of von Hügel and of Evelyn Underhill, J. H. Oldham's *Devotional Diary* and Charles Williams' *New Christian Year*.

Fourthly, it is quite clear that periods of hard physical work are not damaging to the spiritual life. They leave the mind free to offer prayer, and to think over things read in more leisurely times. Manual tasks can often be performed with a sense of spiritual fulfilment. "Anything done exquisitely is worship." On the other hand, the kind of job which demands a high degree of concentration and entirely occupies the surface of the mind without being in itself a source of satisfaction, makes spiritual reflection difficult. One reader, for example, speaks of the mental drudgery attached to teaching—the corrections, the mark adding, the necessity of giving constant and undivided attention. Others have met the same difficulty in office work, and find in a spell of domestic or manual work a chance to renew their spiritual life.

The other side of the picture is, having accepted the discipline of the daily routine as the framework of the life of the spirit, deliberately to devise means of breaking it on occasions. Two young mothers, describing themselves as young members of the Church Assembly, write that "the only real answer to the time-absorbing nature of domestic work lies in the cultivation of life in wider social groups than the family unit," and they want to see voluntary experiments in community living. Another woman writes that she and others have by careful planning succeeded in giving to the members of their group an occasional day of retreat, entirely free from domestic cares.

But the real break-away is into the larger community of the Church. One reader, who is a full-time office worker and runs a home single-handed for an aged father, says, "Of one thing I am certain, and that is the necessity for maintaining contact with the Christian family of the parish, however slight that contact might appear to be." There is more to be said than that the Christian needs the ministry of Word and Sacraments and contact with the wider fellowship of a Christian congregation in order that he or she may go back spiritually refreshed and enabled to practise the life of devotion more effectively. The essential truth is that, for Christians, *all* prayer, wherever it takes place, is in the Church, and every Christian prays as a member of the Divine Society (see, for example, C.N.L. Supplement No. 166, "Concerning Prayer"). It is very easy under pressure of lack of time, or from a disillusioning experience of dull and meaningless worship in some lifeless local congregation, to forget this vital fact. The result is that that community or context within which we do our praying slowly usurps the place of the Church and, perhaps unconsciously, we substitute that community for the Divine Society. It is peculiarly easy to allow the home to become a substitute for the Church, and

to see the devotional life as something which is lived within its pattern. The Church may make it easier for us to live the devotional life in our homes or in any other community where our daily life is set : but if we are prepared to open our lives fully and unreservedly to all that being a member of the Divine Society entails, we may find that the Church makes things not easier but far more difficult, by bringing into our lives a new range of claims and duties and creating conflicts where we would like peace.

Our correspondents made interesting comments on their methods of reading and studying the Bible. Many value the use of a lectionary. One, a business man, writes, "I began trying to live the 'life of the Spirit' about ten years ago, starting almost from scratch. Regular reading of the four Gospels in a modern translation, one chapter per day, starting with St. Matthew, going through to the end of St. John, then back again, with occasional excursions into the rest of the New Testament and sometimes the Old Testament—this is, I feel, far better than reading books *about* religion."

Only three correspondents took up the question of making both the language and the experiences of the Bible meaningful to a generation which finds both equally foreign. Two of the three were connected with broadcasting. Is that because more thought has been given to this question here than elsewhere? How many Christians have ever tried to persuade someone else to begin reading the Bible and with what results? This question is vital for evangelism.

## "TOWARDS THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND"

The News-Letter Supplement on this report (C.N.L. No. 245) has been much in demand and has been reprinted. In the considerable correspondence which has reached us, some readers have thought that it was wrong to quench the smoking flax, and that the Commission should be encouraged to go ahead with the plans proposed. Others were acutely aware of the damage which can be done if a campaign is launched on inadequate or inaccurate presuppositions. We shall from time to time take note of future developments, both in planning by the Churches and in successful experiments which are being carried out. But we cannot always say as much as we should like about the latter because of a well-grounded fear on the part of many who are engaged in successful evangelism that too much publicity may affect adversely what they are doing. Modesty and good taste and Christian humility demand that the efforts of the Churches should be described in sober colours.

It ought to be known, however, that a great deal of good, solid, fruitful work is going on. A correspondent, who has spent a considerable part of the war years in educational and religious



work among the Forces in many different theatres, writes in terms of the highest praise of the Moral Leadership Courses of the Army and the R.A.F. "If anyone despairing of the Kingdom were to worship with the R.A.F. and the W.A.A.F.," he says, "their zeal would be revived. . . . My judgment is that these courses are an outstanding and unqualified success."

The R.A.F. now has permanent centres for these courses at Cheltenham, Hamburg, Rome, Jerusalem and Calcutta. The aim of the courses is to take men and women who are professing Christians, and at a five-day residential course to give them an experience of worship, instruction, discussion and Christian fellowship. Kenneth Mathews, who is a member of the Christian Frontier staff, has recently attended a course at Cheltenham and writes: "The course lasted from Monday evening until Friday afternoon. When I got there on the Tuesday evening, I found an atmosphere of great friendliness had already been created to bind the twenty to thirty who were there into one party. This was the more remarkable in view of the wide differences in rank, job and even colour. All the men had come of their own free will, having either been approached by their Station Padres or themselves having taken the initiative. The waiting-list is considerable.

"A great amount of work was being packed into the time. There was a celebration of Holy Communion before breakfast, and then during the forenoon there would first be a talk each day in the Chapel on prayer, and thereafter in the Common Room two lectures, followed in each case by questions. The lecturing was shared by the four chaplain instructors on the staff. In the afternoon there was a break until tea-time at four, a further lecture after tea, and then in the evening after supper an hour and a half's discussion ended by Compline before bed. By that time the edge had been worn off my mind, but others always seemed ready for more!

"On the first two days the lectures were almost entirely theological, the intention being to give people a 'conspectus' of Christian belief. This was striking in its scope and was evidently meeting a need. I heard men say that never before had they had the chance to be confronted by the Christian faith as a whole, and that they now felt themselves more capable of answering the kind of objections that were thrown at them on their Stations.

"Then during the last day and a half the emphasis shifted to the application of belief to practice, and there were lectures on the Christian in the modern State, in the home and in the post-war world.

"There was no possible doubt about what men thought of the course. On the last night each man spoke in turn of his own reactions. Many wished the course could be lengthened. Many were stirred by the discovery of the concern shown by others for the future, and

by the great insistence throughout the course on the layman's part. A large number spoke of the way in which their eyes had been opened by the practical talks on prayer. There was a constant plea that the method of these courses might be reproduced in what they called 'the civilian Church.' It was not only the chance to learn that they valued. It was the experience of Christian fellowship (they probably did not call it that) which rid them of their isolation and bound them into a group of friends, sharing the same concern and resolved to act together."

The R.A.F. courses are for Christians, and therefore do not strictly qualify for inclusion under the title of Evangelism; but if evangelism depends largely on a keen and informed laity, these courses are playing an important part in preparation for evangelism.

The Army, on the other hand, throws its net wider, as this letter from a senior chaplain shows: "Your Christian News-Letter on the Evangelistic Report has come and I have read and re-read it with such interest that I must write.

"The declaration of peace in Europe found me in Rome, watching the R.A.F. methods at their Leadership School, and since then I have given all my time to starting up and running a Leadership School for the Army in the C.M.F. area. Senior generals felt an urgent need to supply the moral and spiritual gap which undoubtedly exists for a large proportion of men, both officers and others, so two or three of us put our heads together and we planned a school, not for churchmen or convinced Christians, but for leaders in Army units, the men who are in responsible positions and who commanded the respect of their units. We take up to sixty men in ten-day courses with lectures and discussions on the present moral and political breakdown, the meaning of the Christian religion, and the duty of the Christian in everyday problems. At this moment we have twelve army officers, six naval officers, about a dozen sergeants and the rest intelligent private soldiers. We live and feed together, which is new for men after six years of separate officers' and O.R.'s living; and with games and tours and music there is the most splendidly happy and constructive spirit about the School. Reports have come back from the units indicating that real keenness has entered the religious and social life of troops."

How these experiences are to be made available for men and women in "the civilian Church"—and whether indeed they will want them in the same form when they leave service life behind are questions which we shall return to at a later date.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss



## THE CHURCH AND THE PEOPLE

By THE BISHOP OF SHEFFIELD

Why is the good news given to the Churches to proclaim not good news to the generality of people in Great Britain to-day? Why is a hunger for God not present in so many adult members of industrial society, and why do many of the few who have some hunger for God not find the message of the Churches "Good News" for them, or the corporate life of the Churches convincing? These are questions which should be exercising the minds of churchmen continuously and should be prompting us to revise our ways and to make radical experiments in evangelism.

The Churches are at the present time singularly out of touch with what is by far the largest section of the community—the manual workers. While many churchmen are on the whole more sensitive to social injustice and more zealous for social reform than at any period since the Dark Ages, the approach of the Church itself to these issues tends to be middle-class and tepid. We see social injustice not as victims, but as spectators and at best reformers. Few of those who voice the mind of the Churches speak out of the hard-lived experience of the industrial worker and the slum-dweller. Even Methodism which a century ago was very considerably of the people is no longer so to-day; and the Church of England in spite of some splendidly Franciscan ministries in the slums of great cities is not appreciably nearer to the proletariat. Nevertheless where can the Western democracies look for the spiritual view of life and the moral idealism they must have if they are not to become rotten except to the Christian faith? The growing disillusionment over Russia makes the question the more insistent.

### MEN WITHOUT HUNGER

There have always been bad men and worldly men; there have always been men and women driven by social and economic pressures to live little better than animals. But in industrial society a new phenomenon as far as we know has arisen—namely, multitudes who are neither bad nor worldly, in the middle-class sense of the word, but are apparently without any feeling of spiritual need. They are mass producing and mass-produced. Day after day, they follow a limited and limiting routine—out to work, back home, out to club or pub, cinema or dog-track and then home to bed. As industry has changed over from manu-facture to machino-facture, and tradesmen have given place to machine-minders and technicians, their number has probably been increasing. In the heavy industries work, in spite of improved conditions, is rough and

hardening. The houses in which the workers have been reared have been squalid, cramped and crowded. I risk the generalization that the majority are little interested in politics apart from wages. They are deeply suspicious of the bosses, but in many parts of the country they rarely attend either trade union or political meetings. The cinema is their most cultural and—be it noted—entirely passive amusement. The garishness of club and pub, the risks of their weekly bets and gambles, and, in the days of their youth, their love-making—these are the high-lights of a life which would be drab indeed without them. They feel as uncomfortable and out of place in a church as most churchmen would feel in the bar of a pub. Their wives are their mates.

These immense populations are the unresisting product of a machine age, and it is going to be uncommonly hard to get through to any thought or aspiration which might become a hunger for God. Let us hope that more touch with natural beauty, more appreciation of art—literature, better housing and a richer home-life—as well as more responsibility in industry, will let the Light in and make them eventually seek God and find Him.

Nevertheless that is not the whole story. Very many of those who have some spiritual and cultural hunger have no taste for the food we offer. Their social time-table and the time-table of the Church just do not coincide. The intellectual class which has the ear of the more thoughtful technician is that which is confident that greater advances are more likely to come through scientific knowledge coupled with social idealism than through the influence of religious faith. The majority of people in industrial society are being, both consciously and unconsciously, influenced by the scientific outlook on life. Spiritual values and the life of prayer are strange to them. A faith so rooted in history as is Christianity and whose mysticism is so strongly incarnational, will not quickly appeal to those who have no history in their minds and by whom the Bible is little known or understood. Only a minority in the Churches, clergy and laity arouse critical appreciation.

If that is the situation—and poorly attended churches and political meetings and the hard struggle of adult education to keep going are confirmatory evidence—then the evangelistic task of the Church in industrial society is formidable. It will be a long-term policy which will not be short-circuited just by playing the old records with louder needles and more amplifiers, or by tip and run commando raids. It is merely wishful thinking on the part of religious people to hope that the breakdown of civilized society will discredit scientific humanism in the eyes of ordinary folk more than it will discredit the Churches. And it would be an ill-advised and false start to attack the educated classes and the technicians under



such a slogan as "Humanism—the Age-long Lie"—an unhappy caption in the report on "The Conversion of England."

## SOME SIGNIFICANT EXPERIMENTS IN EVANGELISM

A relevant question which that report insufficiently answers is: Are there experiments being made and is there work being accomplished which indicate ways in which the crust of apathy and neutrality can be successfully broken through? Without claiming too much for them, I do know of experiments being made and of things happening which are hopeful although their scale is still small and the ordinary church-goer has as yet little regard for them.

1. There are congregations and churches who are thinking out afresh their function. In Scotland there is the fine experimental work of the Iona Community. In my own communion there are churches, especially in artisan districts, that are developing a strong community life centred round the Table of the Lord. At the Eucharist each Sunday the bread is provided—if not made—by a different family, and the bread and wine are brought at the point in the Liturgy called the Offertory by one or more of them to the celebrant. The Eucharist is followed by a communal breakfast. One evening in the week, the worshippers and some of their friends gather in the vicar's living-room to discuss affairs of Church, Community and State, and to consider their duties and responsibilities. Even in these early days these "parish meetings" are making the challenge of the Christian Faith felt in their neighbourhood. (Cf. Supplement to C.N.-L. No. 228.)

2. Three years ago the Association of Christian Communities in Sheffield, which includes all the colours of the ecclesiastical spectrum from Unitarians to Roman Catholics, appointed Miss Pamela Keely, a professional member of the Religious Drama Society, to foster and direct Religious Drama in Youth Clubs. The L.E.A. makes a generous grant towards the cost. Not only among the players but also among the members of the clubs this has led to a growing interest in the Bible and in Christian truth. It is proving both a cultural and a spiritual force of growing quality among the members of clubs and youth centres, while to some individuals has come as a result a spiritual experience comparable with conversion. This new approach has a great potentiality, conditioned only by the slender amount of suitable religious drama and the limited number of people with the creative resource, devotion and patience for the work.

3. I have been told by those who speak out of experience that the age-group most responsive to a Christian approach is the thirty to forty group. Men and women in these years are facing the responsibilities of family life. Few are so careless as not to

care for the welfare of their children, or so complacent that they do not recognize their impotence. That being so, it would be defeatism on the part of the churches if they did not try to reach out to adults in their most creative years. For some time now the Mothers' Union has been fostering a "Parents Awake" movement, and in these parts it is developing so vigorously that it can no longer be the effort of one organization, but will become the co-operative effort of the whole Church, touching fathers as well as mothers. It links up with religious teaching in Sunday school and day school, and with educational work being done through Moral Welfare and Marriage Guidance Councils. Lectures given on a Christian basis on personal relationships and on sex to girls and women in factories have been a remarkable success, and in not a few cases lead on to personal instruction in the Christian faith. Here, too, the openings are more numerous than the specialists able to enter through them.

4. This brings me to new ventures in pastoral and teaching work to which some time ago you gave publicity (C.N.-L. No. 203), namely the work of chaplains in industry. In Sheffield we do not like the idea of a chaplain being so much a part of a particular industry as to suggest that he belongs to the management. He must be independent, the paid servant of Church not of a secular undertaking, entering the factory with the good will of both workers and management. Having said that, I will leave my Industrial Chaplain, the Rev. E. R. Wickham, to take over—only adding that I wish more men and women had his gift, for the opportunities are lying to hand. He writes: "I am sorry that the Evangelistic Report was not more despondent—I believe that the Church will not be adequate to the situation until she is far more realistic about the present and immediate future. My experience of speaking to societies in the Church makes me feel that we need a lot more despair, in order that we may really cast ourselves in Christian hope upon God—from such a condition alone can new life come. I have a feeling that it is where the Church has really been in obvious ruins that, with good leadership, a new Church is being built up. The numerically healthy churches are probably in the worst state spiritually.

"The vast majority of working-class people are out of touch with the Church. Among the small group of directors, perhaps a third 'go to Church'; a slightly smaller percentage among the managers, but still a considerable percentage; among the 'staff,' a smaller percentage again. When you pass out to the majority of people in the works—those in the shops—the number is infinitesimal, far less than one per cent. This of course is reflected in our churches in Sheffield—the west-end middle-class churches are well attended—as you move east, they decrease in numbers—in the east-end, and



on the new estates (where workers live), congregations are small and often only just surviving.

“Of course the Church’s duty is to witness to *all* men, but the Church would be wise to consider that increasingly this world is the world of the ‘common man,’ and that a Church that cannot be built with common men is doomed to perish. The Church of England particularly needs to bear this in mind, having, as she does, so much in her set-up that is not understood of the uncultured. I am certain that all sorts of experiments have to be tried in working out ways of making easy and fruitful contact with ordinary people in our cities. I am limiting my words to contacts with industry. It is important to realize that England is not atheistic, anti-Christian or anti-clerical—she is neutral, and possibly even ‘neutral-plus.’ But that can’t last and contact has to be made quickly.

“There are some great advantages in making contact with men (and women too) in their places of work. It shows that the Church cares for them in the place where the pressures of life are hardest, that the Church will ‘come out of the churches’ and mix with people, that she goes into the highways and byways (a phrase that is known and quoted by people in criticism of the Churches). With men, I often think it is about the only place where you *can* talk to them—they are frequently out in the evenings. They are very shy on their own, but in a crowd they will face the parson and be quite bold. It is very hard doing work amongst men in the pubs and clubs (though possible), it is impossible at the pictures or dog-track! At work, where there is time, especially on afternoon shifts, the toughest chaps can be got to listen and talk about Christianity.

“The friendliness of the men is quite amazing. I should think the majority like the parson to talk with them—they soon let you know if they don’t! And of course as you talk to them, it becomes crystal clear that they haven’t given up Christianity—they have never known what it was. God alone knows what they learned and were taught in their churches and chapels—for they were all in churches and chapels twenty or thirty years ago.

“It is one thing making contact with these people—it is another thing bringing them into the Church. It is the former that I want to stress, because it is stupid to worry much about the latter, unless we do the former more widely and intensively. Our job is to speak to the masses of the people, and to leave the conversion to God. We have got to do a lot of thinking about the sort of Church set-up that can ever receive these people from outside, but at this point we want to consider wider and more intensive contact rather than how they are to become members of the Church.

“I have said nothing yet about the sort of thing that one is to say. Whatever it is, it has to be said within the larger context of friendliness, mateyness, humour, etc. We have to show that we

know them, expose their needs, show that we know what they are up against. We have to show the inadequacy of much of their thinking and life, whether it's fatalistic, hedonistic, drift, 'one damn thing after another,' etc., etc. We've got to hammer home the truth of Luke 4, 18—in twentieth century terms—that without some spiritual vision we are in very fact poor, broken-hearted, captive (to a thousand things), without any understanding of the liberty of Christian man, blind and bruised. I've talked to men several times on this text, not once without feeling that they were for a few minutes seeing life as it really was—something pretty cruel and deficient. In this 'preparation for the Gospel' there are a number of lines that are acceptable, starting from where men are, and leading them to serious thinking and decision rather than pandering to the argumentative as much apologetic can do.

"I should have misled you if I seem to indicate that this making contact with groups of men in works is easy—it isn't. But it is possible, given entry and the determination, to get the sort of men that one never meets in a church, thinking and talking."

The shortage of man-power to staff the parishes and "fill the pulpits" must not allow the Church to keep from this special work any man or woman who has the calling and is prepared to learn how to do it and to live hard while doing it. If any folk are to go short of the services of the ministry, let it be the faithful. If there were in this centre of industry six, ten, twelve men and women pledged for a period of years and co-operating in this sort of work, in Christ's name, the fruits would be appreciable.

New tactics, however, will not by themselves provide the bridge that has to be built or supply the power that is needed. Unless those who are drawn by these means to new faith in God find in our churches an environment in which they are at home and a life in which they are able to grow, they will either remain in small groups outside or become acclimatized to the atmosphere that still hangs about too many congregations. A new orientation of our Church life there must also be—both a new apprehension of Christ and of the Christian life in community. New? Rather a renewal of the authentic Christian approach, which St. Teresa once put in these moving words: "Only as Christ abides in the men and women of the world can His Kingdom be established here. Christ has no body now on earth but yours. No hands but your hands. Yours are the eyes with which He has to look out in compassion upon our world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good."

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